DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 102 037 SO 007 951

AUTHOR Foshay, Arthur W.
TITLE Coping with Community Controversy: Guidelines for Introducing New Social Studies Programs. SSEC Publication No. 173.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Boulder, Colo.; Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colo.
REPORT NO SSEC-Pub-173
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 37p.
AVAILABLE FROM Social Science Education Consortium, 855 Broadway, Boulder, Colorado 80302 ($1.25)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Community Attitudes; *Community Involvement; Community Support; Conflict Resolution; *Curriculum Development; Educational Problems; Guidelines; *Local Issues; Public Relations; *School Community Relationship; School Role; School Support; *Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Controversial Issues

ABSTRACT

In the last analysis, the school curriculum is under the control of the local education authority and of the people who elect that authority. Looking ahead in the social studies field, it seems evident that social studies teachers will have to accept a task of community education in addition to their task of classroom education. Teachers will have to appear on public platforms, take part in public groups, and in general carry on a program of education of the public with respect to the nature of the social studies and the nature of the issues they wish the students of the schools to be become competent in analyzing. Three principles that arise from the nature of the public school as a social institution are discussed in the first part of this paper: (1) the people have a right to know the rationale and content of what is offered in school; (2) the role of the public schools concerning conflicting beliefs is referee, not antagonist; (3) the one doctrine the school shall insist on is the rule of reason. The second and major portion of the publication contains guidelines to help educators in coping with actual or potential community controversy. The guidelines are arranged in three groupings: those having to do with broad community matters, those pertaining more specifically to the introduction of new programs, and those dealing with response to attacks. (Author/DE)

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COPING WITH COMMUNITY CONTROVERSY: GUIDELINES FOR INTRODUCING NEW SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS

by

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SO 007 951

SSEC Publication #173

Published jointly by:

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Boulder, Colorado, and

Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colorado

1974

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FOREWORD

Both the ERIC system and the Social Science Education Consortium (SSEC) have a major concern with the dissemination, selection, and adaptation of new ideas and materials that will improve our educational system. A prominent obstacle in the way of educational improvement is controversy that arises within the community and results in hasty, emotional, or irrational solutions.

Professor Arthur W. Foshay was asked by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education (ERIC/ChESS) to share his many years of experience in educational change with the constituency of ERIC/ChESS and SSEC, focusing on the problems that must be faced when controversial issues arise in the classroom. To assist Professor Foshay in formulating the content and structure of the paper in its early stages, a number of SSEC members, staff, and guests were assembled in Denver in June 1974. We are grateful for the assistance of these individuals:

Christine S. Ahrens, SSEC Staff Associate

Merrill F. Hartshorn, National Council for the Social Studies

William M. Hering, Jr., The Biomedical Interdisciplinary Curriculum Project

Hazel W. Hertzberg, Teachers College, Columbia University

Robert Klingenfus, Tucson (Arizona) Public Schools

John P. Lunstrum, Florida State University

John J. Patrick, Indiana University

Michael Radz, Olympia (Illinois) Community Unit School District

Bob R. Taylor, University of Colorado

In addition, two persons with appropriate experience in educational change and the management of educational controversy were asked to critique the first draft of the manuscript: Edwin Fenton, of Carnegie-Mellon University, and Todd Clark, of the Constitutional Rights Foundation. Their comments were very helpful in moving the paper toward its final form.

Controversies in education are not of course, confined to social studies and the social sciences. However, there are two considerations which make educational controversy a particular concern to ERIC/ChESS

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and the SSEC. The first is that controversies arise much more frequently in the social studies and social sciences than in other areas of the curriculum. The second is that interactions among individuals and groups constitute the subject matter of the social sciences; the social sciences should, therefore, have some special contributions to make to the management of controversies.

If a single most important aspect of Professor Foshay's paper were to be chosen, it would probably be the constructive approach he takes toward controversy. Controversy is not something to be avoided, obscured, or suppressed. Rather it is a phenomenon to be examined and understood, with the hope that it can then be turned into a constructive educational experience.

Irving Morrissett
Director, ERIC/ChESS
Executive Director, SSEC

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PREFACE

Certain issues will be raised in the minds of professional educationists by positions taken in these guidelines. It is our purpose here to identify these issues, and to offer comments upon them.

1) *Local control of the curriculum.* In the last analysis, the curriculum is under the control of the local education authority and of the people who elect that authority. This is a political fact. Although authority is vested legally at the state level, actual control is exercised locally. State authorities do not mandate curriculum in a very profound sense. With respect to the nature and quality of instruction, state mandates are superficial and are carried out superficially. The only subject matter universally mandated in state legislation is physical education, a field notoriously uneven in quality and, in general, ineffectively adminstered. Although in some states specific mandates in the field of the social studies have been enacted, they function more as prohibitions than as directions. Generally, the farther from local control the curriculum decisions are located, the more superficial and negative they tend to be.

The fact is that the local community is in charge of the quality of the offering in its schools. The schools cannot for long rise above or sink below the local mandate in this respect.

What if the local mandate is, in the opinion of the professional, mistaken? We suggest that in these circumstances what is called for is not political maneuvering to outflank local will but rather community education. It would be hard to overemphasize this point. As we look ahead in the social studies field, it seems evident that social studies teachers will have to accept a task of community education in addition to their task of classroom education. This means that they will have to be selected with an eye to their effectiveness in this respect. We must expect social studies teachers to appear on public platforms, to take part in public groups, and in general to carry on a program of education of the public with respect to the nature of the social studies and the nature of the issues they wish the students of the schools to become competent in analyzing.

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Such a policy carries with it, obviously, certain risks. Teachers can never abandon their role as teacher, even though they may seek to do so. The teacher cannot merely be one among others in the community when talking about his or her own field. It follows that the teacher's tasks in the classroom with respect to controversial issues and in public with respect to these issues calls for the same basic policy: that the teacher clarify, not advocate, inform, not indoctrinate. The task as a teacher in the public arena is to instruct the public in how social studies issues may be analyzed, what information is needed for their successful analysis, and in general what it means to be an informed citizen.

In doing this, teachers will find that some already-existing groups can be of help, but they must be wary of the possibility that these groups have themselves polarized the community. Perhaps it would be well for the school to form its own groups, educational in character. Perhaps, too, the best form for such groups is the old-fashioned study circle or study group. Teacher participation in small groups that give extended attention to the issues dealing with public life would benefit not only the schools and the children, but public life itself.

If the community is mistaken, the function of the teacher is to call attention to the larger policies that make it evident that a mistake is being made. In doing this, teachers cannot, of course, become shrill; they are called upon to be above the battle in the sense that they do not fight at the level at which the mistake is being made, but rather put the mistake in a larger context, rarely calling it a mistake.

2) *The role of the professional with respect to social studies controversy*. There are teachers who will resist the call for a service orientation of the kind just described because they are required to submerge their own beliefs and convictions when they take the instructional mode. What of the teacher's own beliefs and convictions? Especially, what of the teacher's professional convictions--those having to do with what is necessary for instruction of good quality?

There are places to fight and places not to fight. Many a school system has been torn apart, for example, in a fight over reporting practices--whether the student shall be given percentages or grades, or whether these shall be replaced by parent conferences or letters. Obvi-

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Obviously, these are not positions to fight and bleed for; the issue is how parents will receive the information that they should have about their childrens' progress. We can safely "give the lady what she wants," since that is all she will use.

In this connection, teachers are called upon to make a distinction between their private and public lives. Teachers' personal beliefs about what the political structure ought to be are their own. As has been emphasized repeatedly here, teachers are not called upon to impose their personal beliefs on others. These are to be kept private. When one of these personal beliefs is violated by a public that wants to run counter to it, teachers will immediately lose influence *as teachers* if they become antagonists, espousing some variant dogma. This is, of course, not to say that teachers should not and do not have such personal beliefs. They would probably be poor teachers if they did not have personal convictions. But in their role as teachers, they stand not for particular convictions, but for the importance of having convictions of one's own. With respect to convictions that contrast with their own, as with those that agree with their own, their role is to make it more likely that people will develop their convictions on the basis of sound logic and good information. As teachers, they are neutral with respect to public issues. As private citizens, they are called upon to take sides. This is the only viable policy in the arena we are discussing here. The teacher is called upon to be a neutral referee of public discussion, not an antagonistic or sloganeering participant in it. Like the rest of us, teachers are free to run for public office and to join in political organizations that promote specific programs, but never in their role as teachers.

There remains the difficult problem of public will that runs counter to the teacher's professional convictions as distinguished from his private, political convictions. Suppose, for example, that a teacher had reached the professional judgment that students ought to read and analyze a significant document on which our Republic is based, and that some group from the public insisted that the activity be limited to memorizing the document, as if it were mandated Truth. The teacher might well take the position that the public will is mistaken in a professional sense--that memorizing documents and parroting them back is a very poor

substitute for developing one's convictions about what they say, that such parroting actually weakens belief rather than strengthens it, that to carry out the public will in this respect would be to leave the students vulnerable to any propagandist in a position of power who demands that a different dogma be accepted and parroted. We may consider the behavior of the turncoat prisoners in Korea, who demonstrated by their actions that they had not thoughtfully developed their beliefs in the United States and whose belief systems collapsed immediately under the assault of their captors.

In such circumstances, the teacher is bound by professional allegiance to summon enough strength to correct or avoid a public mistake. Suppose, for example, that the teacher has already done his or her best to follow the guidelines given here and has found that there is no place for a referee in the local scene. The teacher must go beyond the local scene for help in these circumstances, appealing to the state authority, demanding of local professional associations that they work on the problem directly, and demanding of national professional organizations that they intervene.

Here again, we are on relatively new ground. Local, state, and national professional associations of teachers have not been noted for dealing with issues of this kind. They will, however, respond to local demand as best they can, for they are generally made up of individuals whose sympathies are identical with those of most teachers, and they hate to see local people bullied. Such appeals, therefore, should be increased in order that the state and national organizations can respond in a more concerned and thoughtful fashion than has been their practice in the past.

3) *The implications of local control for national curriculum projects.* Some national curriculum projects, including some in the social studies, have been constructed without reference to the realities of local educational practice and belief. They have responded to a corpus of professional standards and the structure of their underlying disciplines rather than to what is in fact going on in the school and what is in fact believed. One national curriculum project, for example, sought to replace fifth-grade American history with something else, overlooking the fact that the practice of teaching United States history in grade five is very

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widespread, and that removing it would surely be interpreted as a violation of patriotism. The mistake need not have been made. The project need not have been placed at grade five; the whole affair arose from an ignorance of local conditions.

4) *What basic attitude shall local officials take toward community controversy?* We observed earlier that part of the difficulty in local controversy over the curriculum arises from the fact that there are no real heroes or villains. Everyone means well, but when local officials are beleaguered or harassed by local pressure groups, it is easy to forget this. Yet, on reflection, it seems clear that there is no other attitude to take. When one's motivation is called into question, one protests, but one does not leave it there. One goes to the question of why the insulting implication was uttered. Why, one asks, do my antagonists feel so bitter? What is their real motivation? What is the issue that underlies what they are saying? One then addresses one's self to that issue, not to the more superficial attack that arises from it.

The benign attitude suggested here is not only a practical necessity; it is also a tactical maneuver of great power. Nothing drives the dogmatic, angry, doctrinaire antagonist wild as fast as a benign, receptive response, in which the school officials are more fair in their treatment of the antagonist than the antagonist has been of them. In these circumstances, the antagonist is likely to yield to the temptation to become more vitriolic and shrill, thus antagonizing the public, and defeating his or her own cause.

Apart from this tactical consideration, the basic role suggested here for the schools--that of an agency composed of people who know the issues in great depth and therefore can see the local issue in the context of a larger, more enduring issue--will tend to reduce the irritation that often accompanies these attacks. For example, in Texas a meter has been prepared which contrasts those social practices that lead to freedom with those that lead to slavery. Unfortunately, the meter allows no place for cooperative activity of any kind in its spectrum, nor a place for compassion. It is necessary, when confronted with such a meter, to suggest better labels for the contrasting sides than those offered

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by its protagonists. The real difficulty with the meter is the superficiality of its treatment of the word freedom. The underlying issue from which the meter arose is not freedom versus tyranny, as those who prepared it believed. The underlying issue is public weal versus private weal. What the meter does is to oversimplify an issue of real complexity and importance. The country exists for the benefit of the people in it, but when some people gain a position that enables them to exercise power over others, a framework of ethical requirements is demanded. The issue, therefore, is what is this ethical framework? The issue is not the one posed by the Texas group.

It is up to the local school authority to reframe the issues in some way such as this. In doing so, it can well call on the resources available to it: local people, universities, state officials, those who know the law, and so on. Changing an issue from a political one to an ethical one will, of course, enlarge it very considerably. But this will also make it more profound and more personal. It is this reformulation of the value conflict that we urge here.

Sweet reasonableness comes hard. Hard work is required if we are to penetrate the superficial version of an issue in a way that reveals its fundamental structure. For the same reason that outrageous charges require quick, thorough responses (see Guideline 10 in this paper), hard work is required at the local level to deal with the kinds of issues that are often brought up about the curriculum.

Arthur W. Foshay
August 1974

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COPING WITH COMMUNITY CONTROVERSY: GUIDELINES FOR INTRODUCING NEW SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS

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More than any other subject matter offered in the public schools, the social studies are emotionally charged. The social studies deal with the basic beliefs and institutions that make society possible: patrictism, justice, human relations, and all kinds of social structures, from the family to the United Nations.

For those who seek to avoid all controversy about the content and methods of instruction, social studies is a no-win subject. By its very nature, the truer it is to itself, the more controversial it is. It can seem to violate the dearly held doctrines of many special-interest groups. Even when it is reduced to an array of facts and narratives, it comes under attack for failing to equip students with the ability to detect propaganda and confront issues. It should not be surprising, therefore, that when local school people make changes in the social studies offerings or introduce new programs in this highly sensitive field, their actions are watched with the closest attention; their motives may be viewed with suspicion; and the legitimacy of the new offerings may be questioned.

Since World War II, the schools have been whipsawed by the radical Right and the radical Left. The Right accuses the schools of gross violations of basic American beliefs and suspects a conspiracy; the Left accuses the schools of gross violations of the principles of equity and justice and also suspects a conspiracy. The grossness of the accusations leaves school people shocked, they know their motivations are above reproach; they are often ill prepared to cope with this kind of

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controversy.

The purpose of this statement is to put such controversy in a perspective that will suggest to school people at the local and state level, and also to authors and publishers, what their obligations are when they seek to improve the offerings in the social studies. The first section of this paper describes three principles that apply to curriculum changes. The second, and longest, section then discusses 12 practical guidelines that can help school people to deal with controversies that may arise as new social studies programs are considered and adopted for use in the schools.

Three Principles

I perceive three principles that arise from the nature of the public school as a social institution: that the people have a right to know the rationale and content of what is offered in school; that the school is an instrument of society, not a primary molder of society, and therefore is a referee of social systems, not an advocate of one; and that the school must insist on meeting the basic requirements of the role of reason.

1) The people have a right to know in detail both the rationale and the content of what is being offered in school. No school person seeks to keep subject matter a secret. On the contrary, most school people complain that parents take subject matter for granted and show little knowledge of or interest in the curriculum. However, when parents do show interest, they are too often confronted with jargon-laden "explanations" that do not explain, with appeals for confidence based on an undemonstrated "expertise," and with failures to build confidence in the school's fairness to students. Such behavior builds suspicion and destroys confidence; parents and other members of the community stay away from meetings conducted by school people, finding them boring and uninformative. This principle implies a need for a kind of action by school people and the authors and publishers of curriculum materials that is not common practice.

Perhaps the most pernicious habit of the educationists is the use of jargon. It functions as coded talk, which excludes the uninitiated. When educationists use it, the uninitiated person feels excluded and offended; he or she may well conclude that the speaker is trying to avoid giving certain information. Here are a few examples, culled from recent experience: "values," "behavior," "what we know about learning," "what we know about children," "inquiry," "pedagogical necessities," yes, and "social studies." Reader, be not outraged. Some of these are respectable terms with long histories and explicit definitions. But they confuse the public; they clarify nothing. It is elementary that in seeking to communicate with the non-educationist public, we use the public language. We shall come back to the question of jargon in one of the guidelines.

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2) The role of the public schools concerning conflicting beliefs is referee, not antagonist. Ideally, the school does not trick students into a specific body of unquestioned doctrine. It seeks, instead, to teach the grounds for belief and the importance of commitment, but our ideal American citizen is one who is intellectually independent. Not everyone understands the implications of this principle, but even the radicals react intuitively to its apparent violation.

It does not follow that the school makes no decisions and advocates nothing. It must do both, but in line with principle 1. We seek independence of thought, not a brainwashed population. Our system depends on intelligent, independent, critical citizens, who can examine conflicting doctrines on their merits. The school referees this process in order to defend the rule of reason.

Of course, there is a latent indoctrination going on in the schools all the time: the doctrine of the high value of intellect and of the tools of intellect, the doctrine of the virtue of hard and sustained effort, the doctrine of decent social conduct, the doctrine of proper respect for authority--all these and many more beliefs are proclaimed by the very organization of the school and its daily rituals and practices.

These implied doctrines and (as have been pointed out during recent years) many others have to do with the process of learning, not with the molding of particular versions of what it is to be an American in these times. The goal of the social studies is to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to be participating, active citizens--not conservatives nor liberals nor centrists, but believers in the possibility of rational public decision making.

It is this intent that requires that the schools be the referees, not the antagonists, when conflicting beliefs are brought to bear on social studies programs. The referee is the one who sees to it that the rules are enforced, that the players play fair, and that the score is kept accurately. The schools as referees are responsible for seeing to it that the issues are plainly stated and that the argument is about the issues, that the relevant information is not only made available but is used by the contestants, and that the maneuvers of the antagonists are fair and in keeping with the rules of orderly debate.

There is no law that prohibits people from making fools of themselves.

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Precisely because the beliefs with which the social studies deal are so basic, people will become highly emotional in confronting contrasting beliefs, and they may well say foolish things. The attitude of the school person-referee is to respect the concern thus made evident, and to be benign toward the foolishness--lest the school person himself or herself act the fool.

3) The one doctrine the school shall insist on is the rule of reason. The whole function of the social studies is to make it possible for reason to prevail in public affairs. When reason is challenged, the meaning of education itself is threatened and the educationists have no alternative but to resist with whatever skills and persuasive powers they can ethically bring to bear.

The rule of reason flies in the face of the radical Right and the radical Left. The radicals do not believe that rational discussion contributes to public decisions. They believe that public decisions are based mostly on fear, antipathy, and selfish motivation. They don't believe children should be educated in such a way as to have minds of their own with respect to the nature and quality of their affiliation with their country. It is precisely this position that is the main issue when they attack. They can be expected to use propagandistic devices such as sloganș; appeals to fear and suspicion; *ad hominem* arguments; selective citation; power plays in public bodies such as boards of education, city councils, state legislatures, and, in the case of the radical Left, national political conventions.

There is only one issue on which the educationists are compelled to fight back: the denial to students of access to information and the process of problem solving as a way of learning to make responsible public decisions. Such denial poisons the democratic well; it destroys the integrity of education and threatens the very existence of our free institutions. It weakens the resolve of the people at a time of public crisis, and it must be fought, especially by those in education.

The people have a right to know. The school is a referee of the rational process, not an advocate for a particular set of beliefs.

However, the school must defend the integrity of the rational process as it seeks to develop it among students. These are the principles that grow out of the nature of the school as a social institution in our time.

Guidelines

The three principles described above lead to a number of guidelines that should be applied by local school personnel as they seek to introduce or modify social studies programs. The guidelines have been arranged in three groupings: those having to do with broad community matters (general guidelines), those pertaining more specifically to the introduction of new programs, and those dealing with response to attacks. Taken together, the guidelines offer an outline of a basic approach to coping with actual or potential community controversy.

General Guidelines

1) Know your community. Communities are always heterogeneous. School administrators too often know only one segment of the community--the "community leaders." In dealing with social studies programs, it is necessary to understand the belief systems associated with the economic, religious, ethnic, and occupational status of the various segments of the community. It is not enough to become acquainted with the existing social groups--the various clubs and organizations--though acquaintance with these groups is, of course, important. Because each characteristic of an individual in the community denotes a belief system and because some of the belief systems overlap and some are distinctive, the school personnel should make it their business to learn what the belief systems associated with community characteristics are.

Our heavily urbanized society is more fragmented than it used to be. People have been driven apart by mobility, by the essentially one-way communication of the mass media, and by the emergence of highly self-conscious subgroups--ethnic, occupational, and religious. When communities were more cohesive, it was somewhat simpler to deal with them as wholes. Yet there remains the yearning for community integrity; school people have sometimes provided the means. Knowing the community is a prerequisite to building cohesiveness, even if the problem of gaining such knowledge has changed.

The late Harry Study, for many years Superintendent of Schools at Springfield, Missouri, made it his business to have lunch almost every day at the railroad station restaurant, which was a community gathering

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place. His table was always open to all comers, and while he ate his traditional lunch of oyster soup (the specialty of the restaurant), people joined him to talk about whatever was on their minds. For more than 40 years, he taught an adult Bible class in his church. Alumni from his class were scattered all over town, and he stayed in contact with them. He was an effective and amusing speaker, and was much in demand for local occasions. He never turned down an invitation. His door was open to people in the community, and his telephone would be answered, not by a secretary, but by Harry himself. He built a reputation for utter probity and high idealism. The people obviously thought that all of his mistakes were honest mistakes. He was everywhere in town. He did not identify primarily with the local power structure. He identified himself as a leader of character development in Springfield, Missouri. During the course of his long tenure in office, he introduced what were at the time very radical, Progressive ideas into the local schools during the thirties and forties. Because of his local reputation, there was never a serious controversy about these new practices, although there was often serious questioning of them. He was a father figure to the whole town. What he built was mutual trust.

In doing all of these things, Mr. Study was using the elementary skills known to every local politician of any standing. He did not seek to manipulate; he sought to understand. That's why he was always full of questions. That's why he knew in depth the belief systems of all the groups in the town.

A simple method exists for assessing the attitude of the community toward pending school bond issues. One visits those places where people gather--grocery stores, gasoline stations, barber shops, places of worship, service clubs, and so on--and asks, "Who in town seems to have sound opinions?" After only a few such visits, a kind of community sociogram will appear that reveals the relatively small number of people in town whose opinions represent opinions widely held by others. When these individuals are asked about the bond issue, the ingredients for the various local belief systems pertaining to that issue become apparent.

2) Develop or examine policies for handling new or controversial materials. Everyone knows that schools cannot remain static, but some

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people act as if they ought to. These people are caught by surprise when new material is proposed or when old material becomes controversial. The most effective way to prevent the degeneration of the controversy into acrimonious argument and assaults on personal reputations is to anticipate the problem through the development of acceptable local policies dealing with the new and the controversial. The very act of developing such policies acknowledges that new materials are being examined and perhaps adopted and acts as an effective rejoinder-in-advance to those who think they can find safety in the tried and true.

Such policies should provide for a constant process of problem identification, a scheme for considering how these problems might be dealt with, a plan for community dialogue, a plan for pilot experimentation, and a plan for system-wide adoption.

There are many materials available for the guidance of local administrators on the development and handling of new and controversial materials. Most of the professional associations have issued publications about this. One of the better recent publications is by Ronald G. Havelock (1973). Havelock mentions six areas within which it is suggested that policies be built: making an appropriate relationship, developing an appropriate diagnosis (identification of problem areas), making policies for the acquisition of new materials that purport to deal with the problems as identified or as diagnosed, choosing among possible programs or materials, building local acceptance for the trial of new materials, and self-renewal or continuing studies of innovative possibilities. Havelock's six points correspond to a strategy for considering and introducing innovations. There is a substantial recent literature on this point because so many innovations have been developed since 1960. (See also Miles 1964, Sarason 1971, Rogers and others 1973). One thing all of the writers in this field have emphasized is the necessity for step-by-step evaluation of the phases of the innovation strategy, once it is put into operation.

The policy to be adopted with respect to introducing new and possibly controversial materials corresponds to the innovation strategies that have been developed during the past 15 years. It should be emphasized, perhaps, that a strategy must be comprehensive in its scope or the innovation will not take place. It will, as has been so common, result in a

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short burst of activity and a failure to be institutionalized. The story of innovation in American education is, by and large, a story of failure. Most innovations do not take root. Local awareness and interest may be aroused through the press and through public meetings for a proposal which is not itself well enough designed to be carried out. Or local experimentation may not be undertaken, whereupon the innovation will collapse because of its failure to fit local circumstances. Or, as in one famous instance, the local reward system is structured to reward the innovator but not to reward adoption of the innovation by others within the same system. The importance of preparation of local policies and the adoption of sensible strategies for innovation cannot be overemphasized.

3) Turn community controversy into worthwhile community discussion. Difficult as community controversy is for local school officials, even worse is community apathy. School people know that there are many aspects of education that the public simply will not consider or will insist on considering in a superficial fashion.

The best strategy is to take every instance of controversy as an opportunity for invoking a thoroughgoing, widespread public discussion of educational purposes, contents, and methods, as well as the many problems of teaching that arise from differences among the children in school. Those of us in education know things that the public does not appreciate: how ambiguous the enterprise of education really is, how little we really know, how uncertain our final decisions are. The only way we can avoid projecting a false certainty is to involve the public in the depths of educational problems. Community controversy offers us such an opportunity, and we should take it.

Introducing New Programs

4) Involve the community early. Because the community has a right to know what is being taught in school, it is essential that new proposals be presented for comment and criticism as early as possible to as many people as possible. People involved should be as representative of the varying belief systems in the community as possible; they should certainly

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include those individuals whose opinions are influential. The invitation to take part in the discussion of the proposed change should be issued frequently and openly. The new program should be explained over and over again.

What we are talking about here, of course, is the elementary requirement for effective communication or, better, effective dialogue. For such dialogue, there are no entrance requirements except the desire to take part.

In preparing for this dialogue, the following steps may be useful:

(a) Explain the intentions of the new program. What problems does it seek to solve?

(b) Present the substance of the new program. Use whatever materials exist: films, printed materials, tapes, and so forth.

(c) If the program has been tried elsewhere, indicate the strengths and weaknesses that have shown up so far.

(d) Solicit questions. Do not try to answer all the questions yourself; expect other participants in the dialogue to take part in answering questions as well as asking them.

The intent in conducting such meetings is to create a peer relationship between the school people and the members of the community with respect to the subject matter. It should be emphasized that although a presentation of information is necessary, the intent of the meeting is to promote dialogue, not merely to present information. If the school people who present the information also present themselves as authorities on the solutions to the problems that are involved, no dialogue will take place and the meeting might as well not be held.

In Glens Falls, New York, the teaching of world affairs was presented in the positive way described above (Long and King 1964).

> Shortly after the ITWA [Improving the Teaching of World Affairs] program got under way, the Director of the project, acting upon the authorization of the Board of Education, invited city officials, representatives of service clubs and civic associations, members of the Parent-Teachers Association, and other interested citizens to a public meeting. After a discussion of the aims of the newly launched pilot study, those attending the meeting formed a Citizen's Committee for ITWA with the city librarian as chairman. . . . Ties between the schools and the community were also strengthened through the direct coordination of the ITWA program and projects in

> international education carried on by organizations such as the Red Cross, the Girl Scouts, the Rotary Club, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the Glens Falls Committee for the United Nations (p. 39).
>
> The information services from both the schools and the community provided another essential link in the chain of cooperation. From the beginning, the two local newspapers . . . worked closely with the ITWA office. Photographers and news reporters were always on hand to cover the arrival of guests and to report newsworthy programs. . . . [I]nformation reached the community [also] through *The School Bell*, a printed publication sponsored by the Teachers Association and the Board of Education (p. 40).
>
> At about the same time as the World Affairs Council was showing young people from other countries to Glens Falls, the Chepontuc Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution sent its delegate . . . to Washington. [The delegate] went to the Continental Congress with instructions from her Chapter to oppose any DAR resolutions opposing the United Nations. Five years before, another Glens Falls delegate . . . had had to stand alone and vote "No" on an anti-UN resolution. [This time the delegate] was one of 75 in a convention of 2,000 to oppose a similar resolution (pp. 43-44).

The local delegate was congratulated in one of the local newspapers.

Even more recently, in Tenafly, New Jersey, the superintendent, John B. Geissinger, coordinated the introduction of sex education into the local schools. A community dialogue was set in motion that lasted for a year, during which all interested people were invited to take part. The entire course was given, all materials were presented for examination, and the discussion was full and complete, even repetitious. Following this year-long effort, the program was introduced into the schools without a ripple. Everybody who had any interest in it had heard over and over again exactly what the offering was to be, and it received community approval in a town in which there might have been severe disapproval.

5) <u>Try to anticipate the areas of controversy</u>. In the degree that one is acquainted with the belief systems characteristic of various segments of the local population, it is possible to anticipate controversy where elements of these belief systems are challenged or violated. Areas of potential controversy are well known to publishers and their representatives, and these people are a good source of information on controversies

to be anticipated.

Some controversial topics that have appeared in various places in the country recently include:

Sex education
Theory of evolution
Racism
Ethnic studies
Social class membership
Values education
Politics
Alcohol and drugs
Comparative economic systems
Religious beliefs (including the beliefs of agnostics and atheists)
War
National allegiance and patriotism
Community involvement
Attitude inventories
Opinion surveys (as violations of privacy)

In addition to these substantive areas, a number of elements of teaching style are also controversial in some places:

"Sociological style" (referring to attitudes and opinions characteristic of various socioeconomic groups, having students work with "primary" information from social science sources)

"Behavioral sciences" approach versus "factual-chronological" approach (for example, examining the socioeconomic causes of the Civil War or the immigrant and the Black as a source of cheap labor rather than taking the traditional approach to American history)

Inquiry approach versus didactic approach (inquiry perceived as drawing children into the examination of questions beyond their maturity level)

Learning activity packages (perceived as shaping behavior)

Inquiry into forbidden territory (for example, a study of ecological considerations which leads students to raise questions about the pollution of local streams by the town's biggest employer)

Maximum growth versus minimum essentials (essential skills viewed as prerequisites before any inquiry or creative behavior can be encouraged)

Continuous progress versus grade standards (a variation of the minimum essentials approach, in which the notion that children grow unevenly is called into question)

Treatment of public issues in the classroom versus the treatment of that which is certainly true (unresolved public issues to be ignored in the classroom until they are resolved)

As was observed earlier, if one sought to avoid all of these areas of potential controversy, the program would quickly become so sterile that its very sterility would become an area of controversy. What we

need to emphasize here is that such areas should be anticipated and preparations made to deal with them openly. We should remember that it is long-range solutions to locally controversial problems that we seek. If a "victory" over opposition in the short range becomes the local school person's strategy, he ordinarily will have lost his long-range attempt to place the schools in the referee's position and to keep them open for community comment and influence. What is advocated here is not that local school people panic and cave in in the face of local community controversy, but rather that they insist that the controversy be carried out in the open, that the issues be clearly identified, and that they be discussed openly by the public.

What is sought in the long run is not clarification through the urging of adversary positions, but rather the community attitude of reasonableness about matters of concern. The ultimate matters of concern are rarely made manifest by controversies over the kinds of topics listed above. It is important that these more ultimate matters be brought forward in the course of the community dialogue we have been discussing. If no one else does it, it is up to the school person to do it or to see that it is done. What people have in common as they think about the education of their children is the hope that the children will emerge from school able to think reasonably, skilled in obtaining information that will assist their attempts to be reasonable, and equipped to cope with the economic, social, and ideological problems that adult life presents to them. It is the duty of the school person to indicate the relationship of the immediate controversies to these ultimate concerns.

6) Always try new programs on a pilot basis before adopting them on a district-wide basis. There is no way to know how a given program will fit local circumstances without first trying it out. It is a widespread practice in school districts to order one set, or perhaps two, of a new program for trial before considering it for district-wide use. Such local trials may well suggest modifications of the program to fit local circumstances. Even more important, given the discussion above on the importance of evidence, pilot trials provide the opportunity for local evaluation of given programs.

There are three considerations to be borne in mind in conducting

local trials:

a) The opinions of the teachers who try the materials concerning the way they "work" or "don't work." A publication of the Social Science Education Consortium, *Curriculum Materials Analysis System* (1971), will be found useful in this connection. The system provides a comprehensive evaluative scheme for examining proposed new materials, both before trying them and while they are being tried.

Another useful publication is *How to Handle Controversial Issues*, No. 14 in the *How to Do It* Series published by the National Council for the Social Studies (Gross 1964). Gross has raised seven questions which, though directed at the handling of controversial issues with pupils in the classroom, can as well be applied to the treatment of any proposed new program material:

1) Is this issue beyond the maturity and experience level of the pupils?
2) Is this issue of interest to the pupils?
3) Is this issue socially significant and timely for this course and grade level?
4) Is this issue one which the teacher feels he can handle successfully from a personal standpoint?
5) Is this issue one for which adequate study materials can be obtained?
6) Is this issue one for which there is adequate time to justify its presentation?
7) Is this issue one which will clash with community customs and attitudes? (Gross 1964, pp. 1-3)

With respect to question 7, the previous comments on the necessity for community dialogue would seem to be pertinent. Gross points out that teachers should not be left on their own without administrative and school board backing in dealing with matters that conflict with local mores and the climate of opinion.

b) In addition to gathering the opinions of experienced teachers concerning how materials "work," it is important to gather more objective information. Here the authors and publishers of the curricular materials have an important responsibility. They should provide the tools for evaluation for the kinds of achievement that are relevant to the material they have produced. Failure to do this makes it entirely too likely that the materials will be evaluated on an irrelevant basis and perhaps

accepted or rejected for the wrong reasons. There have been several examples of good nationally developed curricular material being tried out by local school staffs and being dropped in favor of older programs simply because the teachers knew the older program much more deeply than they could know the newer one. The provision of appropriate evaluative devices for use in gathering evidence on the effects of programs would have prevented such mistakes.

c) Do not promise success with experiments. If an experiment is foreordained to succeed, it is not an experiment at all; it is a demonstration.

The general hypothesis underlying local experimentation with new programs should be that, if a new program is tried, certain specifiable learning objectives will be achieved by a given percentage of the students. If concrete evidence on the achievement of specified objectives is gathered and made available, then an informed local discussion of the program's acceptability can be undertaken. In the absence of such evidence, local discussion would be based on subjective opinion and unsupported beliefs. While such discussion may conceivably result in wise decisions, the odds for wise decisions are greatly improved if the evidence is made available.

Even in states where state adoptions and approval systems are in force, there is usually provision for local experimentation. Local school systems should take full advantage of this freedom.

7) Consult either the designer or publisher concerning the exclusion of controversial topics from the program. It is possible that, following full and free discussion in which the issues are identified and all the points have been accurately expressed, it will be the local desire that certain topics be excluded from the social studies program. The decision that must be made in these circumstances is to be based on the relationship between the topics identified and the program as a whole, and the best source of information concerning the integrity of the program as a whole is the designer. If the exclusion of the topic seriously interferes with the integrity of the program as a whole, then the program, not the topic, must be dropped. The essence of this guideline is that topics cannot be considered in isolation from the programs of which they are a

part.

It follows that the author and publisher are responsible for preparing and publishing their program's rationale explaining the program's purposes and the relationships of learning activities to the purposes. This relationship should be clear enough so that the rationale indicates clearly whether a given topic or line of activity is integral to the program as a whole or whether it is only an embellishment.

For example, a major purpose of a program could be that students understand the heterogeneous quality of American communities. There are several routes to such an understanding, one of which might be a community opinion survey concerning some locally controversial topic. Whether such a survey must be undertaken in order to achieve the purposes of the program is a question to be settled by the designer of the program, not by the local school people or community participants.

This guideline will not be as obvious to some local school officials and community participants as it might seem. Some consider the curriculum to be a list of topics, any one of which can be dropped or changed, resulting in a slightly altered curriculum. The inadequacy of the view of the curriculum as a list of topics has been apparent to curriculum theorists for several generations. Whole programs have their own integrity and programmatic purposes. A curriculum is what binds together an array of topics. The topics are instrumental to the purposes of the curriculum; they are not the curriculum of themselves. That is why adding or dropping a given topic from an array is to be considered in connection with the integrity of the program taken as a whole.

8) Explore mechanisms that aid or block adoption. The farther decisions are from the people, the easier it is to distort or block them. The practice of state adoption and state approvals of curriculum materials makes it easy for any special-interest group working in a concerted fashion to gain access to the decision machinery and wreak its will without actual public debate. Most people know very little about how state legislatures reach decisions or how state boards of education render judgments. Those who do have this knowledge are in a position to win their points without reference to anything approaching the popular will. This problem has been illustrated recently in Arizona, where a

special-interest group gained access to the legislature during its closing moments and put the legislators in the position of seeming either to vote for or against God, mother, and country.

To reduce the power of such machinations, it is desirable to take full advantage of whatever state provisions exist for carrying on local experimentation. Of course, the experimentation has to be genuine, not a masked adoption. But to carry on a pilot trial locally is to provide local people with evidence on which to base their judgments about whether a given program should be adopted. Evidence is the best material for making controversial programs discussable in a reasonable fashion. *It is better to discuss what the evidence indicates than it is to discuss whether somebody who supports a given view is virtuous.* The gathering of evidence about programs is the best protection we have against *ad hominem* arguments.

Responding to Attacks

9) Analyze issues expertly and present them fairly. A good deal of the bitterness that arises during local controversies has its origin in simple confusion. When, for example, someone from the radical Right or radical Left makes an outrageous charge, one's primitive response is to reflect the outrage with a kind of counter-outrage. For example, when an extremist accuses a curriculum developer (as happened in Texas) of violating the commandment to honor one's parents, to respond with indignant denials is to accept the extremist's grounds for debate and to lose the possibility of reasonable consideration before discussion starts.

To analyze issues expertly is to run the apparent issue back to its fundamental nature and then to "play back" or re-present the issue in clearer terms than its advocate has managed to summon. The device of echoing or playing back the argument of one's opponent is of great importance in providing the grounds for reasonable discussion. This technique makes clear to everyone that one has listened with care to the opponent's argument, thus paying him the compliment of having heard him. In these encounters, one wants not only to *appear* to be a listener, but to *be* an expert listener. If, for example, in discussing the open classroom one puts forward the concept of a classroom climate that invites creative

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behavior and tolerates a limited amount of aberration; and if someone who is suspicious of this approach asks if you "believe in discipline"; the answer is not, "Yes, I do," or "No, I don't." The answer would seek to go beyond the question to its roots: "Yes, I believe that children need a clear and definite framework in which to carry on their educational activities."

The essence of the fair and expert replaying of an adversary's position is to assume that his motivation is reasonable and proper and to respond in terms of his probable motivation rather than in terms of whatever irritating or tactically diversionary things may have been said. One proceeds on the assumption that in educational debate there are rarely clear-cut "good guys" and "bad guys." The problem with educational debate is that everybody almost always means well. As the old parson said, "The real problem is not to distinguish between good and bad, but between good and better."

10) Recognize the radical assault. The tactics used by members of the radical Right and the radical Left are almost identical. Unfortunately, the response of school people has been almost identical, also.

The basic tactic of the radicals is to make an outrageous charge of some kind, which assaults the basic integrity of the school person. From the radical Right, the charge is that children are being taught to disobey the Ten Commandments, to deny God, to be traitorous to the country, or to destroy the integrity of the family. From the radical Left, the charge is that the most elementary principles of human justice and equity are being violated, that those in power (the "power structure") are robbing those who are not in power, and that groups of people are being denied the elementary rights of American citizenship and human dignity.

Both groups invariably charge that there is a conspiracy to enforce these evils on innocent children. One hears that the evil consequence of the nefarious acts of the school people is "deliberate"; that there is a "cabal"; one hears dark suspicions of secret meetings being held; each side accuses school people of being intentional or unintentional participants in either a Fascist or Communist conspiracy.

These are the hallmarks of the radical assault. They have usually

left the school people and their friends immobilized. A typical response to such assaults has been panic. The offending materials are hastily withdrawn, or students are forbidden to conduct a community survey of any kind, or rituals that are supposed to signify our willing affiliation with our country or our religions are enforced. Such a response does not remove the controversy; it feeds it.

It is important to remember that the real antagonist of the radicals is always the reasonable center, and the school people are surrogates for this center. The effective response to such assaults is to refer the problem to the center--to the general public, including parents and students. The radicals, because they do not trust the democratic process, very rarely have recourse to it. They would rather connive, because they believe that they live in a conniving world. The most effective strategy is one that forces the issue into open public discussion, thus allowing centrist groups to form themselves in such a way as to counter their antagonists. Once more, we stress that the proper role of the schools in these situations is not that of antagonist, but of referee. The proper responsibility of the schools is to force the issues into open public discussion and to insist that the discussion be open and free. Our political system works, given a chance. One of the best ways to get issues clarified is through a full, active political campaign. If someone from the radical group will run for office against someone from the centrist group, and if the campaign includes a discussion of the issues, then the will of the people can be exercised and the schools can perform their proper function.

Another response that has been found exceedingly helpful is a quick, full, detailed written rejoinder to whatever the charges are. Over and over again during the past generation it has been demonstrated that, if the school people or the publishers will take the trouble (and it is a lot of work) to respond in detail with full documentation to the charges that are made against them, the charges will melt away. The responsibility for such detailed rejoinders rests equally on local school officials and on authors and publishers of curriculum materials. The right-wing assault on reading methods during the mid-fifties resulted in the introduction of narrowly conceived phonics programs in those places where the local officials or nearby universities did not take the trouble to analyze and

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respond to Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read*. In all those places where a detailed rejoinder to the book was written, or given to the local press, the effect of the assault on the reading program was to improve the reading program. The same thing has been found in the case of the Holt Social Studies Curriculum. The principal author of the materials has responded in detail to a number of the charges made against the materials in various locations in the country and has found that such responses are effective. The amount of work involved in preparing such responses is very great at the outset, but as the charges go on and begin to repeat themselves, the amount of work diminishes. The effect is well worth the effort.

11) Identify actual value conflicts, especially those having to to with the interests of the students, teachers, and administrators. The whole effort put forth in this series of guidelines is to promote rational discussion of real issues. Most accusations and doubts do not come from the radical Right or the radical Left; they come from people who belong to neither group but who are fo. one reason or another concerned or doubtful about the value of school practices and school materials. To call into question either the motivation or the competence of such people is to turn a query into a controversy. They have a right to detailed, informative responses; where there is a real value conflict, the value conflict itself requires detailed, sympathetic, thorough examination in the public arena.

Sometimes such people rally around slogans or educational practices that have been widely promoted in the press. They may bring pressure upon local administrators to stop practices that are not thoroughly developed. When this happens, the appropriate response is to call for a thorough study of the practice in question. The formation of pressure groups is a fundamental democratic right. It is recognized at the national and state levels when lobbyists are permitted to carry on their work under the general rubric of redress of grievances. The time spent responding to such groups is well invested; they ordinarily mean to be supportive of the schools, not destructive of them.

In responding to such groups and individuals, it is very important that the rules of communication be observed. Principal among the

violation of these rules is the use of educational jargon. Here are some terms that are understood fairly well among educationists but are obscure jargon to the general public:

Jargon	Plain English
Values	Beliefs and convictions
Behavior	What people do or think
Readiness	Prepared to go on
Non-graded	Continuous
Shaping behavior	Training
Articulation	Unbroken continuity
Grades or marks	Reports of accomplishment
Evaluation	Evidence of accomplishment
Achievement	Accomplishment
Inquiry	Examining alternatives
Social studies	Study of society

This list is illustrative, of course, and not everyone will agree with the attempted translation of jargon into plain English. Perhaps most important is that educationists constantly monitor the way they are understood by asking as often as possible that their hearers say back to them what they have understood the educationist to mean.

Of course, such "playback" is useful on both sides of the attempts to communicate. As Carl Rogers once pointed out, people are inveterate evaluators. One's impulse is to evaluate what one hears and to respond according to one's evaluation. If there is any faint doubt that one has understood the message correctly, the device of saying back to the speaker what one thinks the speaker meant will allow him or her to correct your understanding. If you have misunderstood him or her, the discussion can be straightened out and then go forward on a clear basis, rather than on the confused basis that frequently underlies much communication. If someone asks you, "Do you believe in patriotism?," don't answer, "That depends on what you mean by patriotism." That is fencing. Respond by indicating what you think the speaker means the term to imply and compare that meaning with yours, provided the speaker agrees with your explanation of her or his meaning. For example, one might respond by saying, "By patriotism I think you mean that people ought to feel a part of the country, not alienated from it. Is that correct?"; or, perhaps, "By patriotism, I don't think you mean mere flag saluting and recitation of the pledge of allegiance. I think you mean more than that, don't you?"

Perhaps this guideline can be summed up in two ways: Assume that

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those who raise questions are serious and well motivated, and try to achieve intercommunication with them as effectively and as skillfully as possible.

12) Make certain that the controversy concerns the content and methods of the program and not something else. Discussions of content and methods sometimes serve as surrogates for a difficulty of some other kind. The local official should try to make certain that the controversy concerns the content and methods of the program and not something else that the teacher may be doing. For example, it is possible that a teacher who has failed to establish an adequate framework for conduct within the class (has poor discipline) may also be offering a program with a strong "humanistic" emphasis. In these circumstances, the children can be expected to achieve little and to be contemptuous of the content. It is important that the teacher's difficulty with discipline not be confused with the substance of what the teacher is attempting to develop. Similarly, content could be confused with a teacher's grading practices (too tough or too lenient) or with outside activities the teacher may be carrying on (for example, as a member of a radical group or a participant in a locally disapproved life style).

Teachers, being human, have their own belief patterns. It is entirely possible for a teacher to slip into advocating his or her beliefs or imposing them upon the students, thus violating part of the basic code of ethics of the teaching profession. If the teacher's particular belief system corresponds to parts of a social studies program, onlookers may blame the program, not the teacher.

Conclusion

The whole effort in this statement of guidelines is to head off controversy, not to counter it. Countering controversy will drive it to more extreme forms. When a community is ripped apart by a curriculum issue, one can be quite certain that attempts to deal with it early in the ways outlined here either have not been made or have been made ineptly.

But you cannot win them all. There will be nationally financed, sophisticated attacks from the Left and from the Right. Some of these will succeed despite our best local efforts. With respect to such national attacks, local measures are often insufficient, even though qualitatively good.

It is in this context that we close this discussion: When a local issue gets out of hand, turn it into a state or national issue. Don't try to contain it at the local level.

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